



The role of the urban scale in anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: a look at post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia

Aleksandra Piletić

To cite this article: Aleksandra Piletić (2022) The role of the urban scale in anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: a look at post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia, *Globalizations*, 19:2, 285-300, DOI: [10.1080/14747731.2021.1882817](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1882817)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2021.1882817>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 15 Feb 2021.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 2467



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 14 [View citing articles](#)



OPEN ACCESS



The role of the urban scale in anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism: a look at post-2012 neoliberalization in Belgrade, Serbia

Aleksandra Piletić

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In recent years, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ has emerged as a leading framework for understanding the specificities of neoliberalization post-2007/8 financial crisis. The concept has acquired particular salience in the study of urban transformations as cities have been portrayed as key sites for the articulation of authoritarian neoliberalism. This paper argues against a purely territorial conceptualization of authoritarian neoliberalism in cities, conceiving the latter as targets of neoliberal restructuring construed within an overarching, centralized state. Rather, it argues that understanding the state as a multiscale field of social compromises allows us to better flesh out this complex phenomenon. Empirically, it traces processes of regulatory rescaling surrounding the implementation of the Belgrade Waterfront project in Serbia which has simultaneously led to a strengthening of decision-making at the national level *and* rendered the urban scale more permeable to contestation, paving the way for the emergence of key grassroots organizations like Ne Da(vi)mo Beograd.

KEYWORDS

Authoritarian neoliberalism; cities; Belgrade Waterfront; Serbia; grassroots resistance

In recent years, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ (Bruff, 2014, 2016; Bruff & Tansel, 2019) has emerged as a persuasive theoretical and conceptual prism for capturing the particular form that neoliberalism has adopted following the 2007 financial crisis. It has allowed us to formulate an understanding of the systemic ways in which coercive mechanisms of the state have been strengthened at the expense of consensual ones (without viewing the two as mutually exclusive). A range of contributions have demonstrated that authoritarian forms of neoliberalism have emerged both in states with a history of authoritarian modes of governance (e.g. Turkey, Mexico (Tansel 2018, 2019; Jenss, 2019)) as well as formally democratic ones (e.g. the European Union (Bruff, 2016)). This research agenda has therefore made admirable advances in offering a nuanced understanding of tendencies within present-day neoliberal contexts whilst at the same time acknowledging that these tendencies are inherently intermeshed with contingencies and contextual specificities (and therefore continuous with preceding, pre-crisis forms of neoliberalism).

Within this research agenda, a number of prominent contributions have drawn attention to the important role of urban space in anchoring authoritarian neoliberalism(s) (e.g. Di Giovanni, 2016; Jenss, 2019; Tansel, 2019). Whether through their role as key sites for the implementation of neoliberal projects articulated by an increasingly centralized state, or vis-à-vis their embeddedness

CONTACT Aleksandra Piletić  a.piletic@uva.nl  @apiletic

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

within broader multiscale projects intertwining security and austerity logics, cities have been portrayed as key sites for the assertion of authoritarian neoliberalism. In this paper, I build on these contributions and aim to clarify what it means for a city to be reconstituted under authoritarian neoliberalism.

To this end, I adopt an understanding of authoritarian neoliberalism as a process of *rescaling* (Jenss, 2019) in the transition from a pre-2007 financial crisis form of neoliberalism to a reconstituted and inherently authoritarian form in the period from 2007 until the present day. Rather than conceiving cities as sites where authoritarian neoliberal restructuring plays out, I propose exploring the broader reconfiguration of interscale relationships within the state. Understanding authoritarian neoliberalism as a process of rescaling also allows us to address recent critiques that authoritarian ‘impulses, maneuvers, and formations’ have been a persistent – albeit episodic – component of neoliberalism since its early days (Peck & Theodore, 2019, p. 257). By capturing the changing scalar articulation of state power, it becomes possible to theorize the *systemic* component of authoritarian neoliberalism (and therefore how it differs from previous, intermittent bouts of authoritarianism across neoliberal contexts). In this context, I propose transcending the dichotomy of centralization/decentralization when speaking of authoritarian neoliberalism (and therefore developing a more nuanced understanding of the changing relationship between ‘city’ and ‘state’) so as to conceptualize the new modalities of governance established through authoritarian neoliberalism.

This paper proceeds in four parts: in the first part, I explore key conceptual facets of authoritarian neoliberalism, as well as how studies of cities have figured in regard to these conceptualizations. Next, I draw on theorizations of scale that allow us to understand the state as a multiscale set of institutional compromises, which then leads me to propose a modified perspective for studying cities in an authoritarian neoliberal context. In the third part, I illustrate my argument by charting multiscale regulatory transformations that surrounded the implementation of the Belgrade Waterfront (BW) project in Serbia. The final section points to how this rescaling has also rendered the urban scale more permeable to social contestation; I describe the range of new social movements that have emerged in response to the BW project and how the urban scale is now an increasingly effective terrain for anti-neoliberal struggles.

Authoritarian neoliberalism, the state and the city

In his 2014 article, Ian Bruff argues that the 2007 financial crisis weakened the ‘hegemonic aura’ of neoliberal practices such that they are now ‘less able to garner the consent or even the reluctant acquiescence necessary for more “normal” modes of governance’ (2014, p. 115). This has led to the emergence of more coercive forms of neoliberal restructuring and contributed to a fundamental reconfiguration of the state in a nondemocratic direction, most notably through a reliance on a range of legal and constitutional changes allowing the state to insulate itself from social and political dissent (Bruff, 2016, p. 114). The state has therefore expanded its reach without having to grant concessions to subordinate social groups, penetrating more deeply into different areas of social life so as to ‘stabilize the contradictions and dislocations emanating from socioeconomic restructuring’ (Bruff, 2014, p. 119). This transformation has had the effect of simultaneously strengthening and weakening the state – both allowing it to expand its reach *and* rendering it more vulnerable to contestation (Bruff, 2014, p. 124).

The authoritarian neoliberalism research agenda charts two different research trajectories – ‘one focusing on the intertwinement of authoritarian statisms and neoliberal reforms; and another which traces various lineages of transformation of key societal sites in capitalism (e.g. states,

households, work-places, urban spaces)’ (Bruff & Tansel, 2019, p. 239). While the former is concerned with the ways in which neoliberalisms permeate existing authoritarian political regimes, the latter refers to the pathways through which formally democratic regimes resort to authoritarianization in the wake of increasing contradictions within neoliberal modes of governance. At the same time, the authors also implicitly seem to distinguish between two research avenues – one concerned with authoritarian neoliberal *forms of the state* and another seeking to investigate the *sites* (e.g. urban spaces) in which authoritarian neoliberal statisms are expressed. The two are not posited as mutually exclusive, but nevertheless appear to capture different problematiques within the broader research agenda (Bruff & Tansel, 2019). By separating investigations pertaining to urban transformations from ones that investigate the ‘authoritarianization’ of the neoliberal state, however, the research agenda implicitly treats urban spaces as *territories* rather than viewing them as co-constitutive of wider sociospatial relations within the state.

For instance, Tansel (2019) proposes ‘executive centralization’ – the concentration of key decision-making powers within the executive arm of the government – as a key analytical lens for studying the transformation of the authoritarian neoliberal state. The implicit dichotomy between centralization and decentralization posits the state either as concentrating power at the national level or as diffusing power away from the national level. While this lens does provide considerable insight into the transformation of the state at the national level, it has the unintended consequence of suggesting that urban transformations are either the result of top-down state action or the result of decision-making conducted locally. In this sense, Tansel (2019, p. 328) argues, ‘executive centralization has taken hold of urban governance.’ This view is reasserted by Di Giovanni (2016, p. 112) who argues that city-making under authoritarian neoliberalism is a process engendered and articulated by the state.

However, viewing urban transformations through the lens of a process of centralization/decentralization precludes us from identifying the active role played by the urban scale in the construction of an authoritarian form of neoliberalism (Lawreniuk, 2020); it also obscures the multitude of relationships existing between different scales, and the complex ways in which they intermesh at different times and in different places. For instance, it obscures the all-too significant role played by processes at the international scale in nurturing a particular fraction of capital (i.e. finance) and the ways in which agents respond to these imperatives through a variety of compromises at different levels (including national, urban, household, etc.).

The authoritarian neoliberal state must therefore be understood in a multiscalar sense, as a product of social compromises that are institutionalized at a variety of different levels (including, but not limited to, the national). While decision-making at the national scale does predominate at a certain time and a certain place, other scales (most notably the international and urban) must not disappear from view. In other words, much like the nation-state was never ‘absent’ in pre-2007 crisis forms of neoliberalism – and in fact played a crucial role in providing the regulatory and legal infrastructure for the functioning of markets – the urban scale must also not be analytically abstracted from an understanding of authoritarian neoliberalism. A multiscalar perspective allows us to paint a more complex picture of urban transformations under authoritarian neoliberalism, as well as to pinpoint potential avenues for contestation and resistance.

This conceptualization very much echoes the contribution made by Jenss (2019) who traces processes of authoritarian neoliberalization in the urban context of Oaxaca, Mexico. Jenss pinpoints the multiscalar aspects of authoritarian neoliberalism through an analysis of the rescaling of austerity policies and security provision in Oaxaca (Jenss, 2019, pp. 304–305). Namely, the establishment of an ‘authoritarian neoliberal fix’ is portrayed through the lens of dynamic scalar

restructuring – authoritarian neoliberalism is therefore a product of the convergence of ‘various scales of policy-making’ (Jenss, 2019, p. 309). In this sense, the rescaling that authoritarian neoliberalism entails is portrayed as a dual movement: (a) an ‘upscaling’ of control and coercion onto the national scale and (b) a ‘downscaling’ of fiscal discipline (Jenss, 2019, pp. 310–311). This leads us to take a step further in conceptualizing, as Jenss (2019, p. 314) argues, ‘the multi-scalar character of state power’. I build on this conceptualization and argue that we should move forward in theorizing the multiscalar nature of authoritarian neoliberalism by paying closer attention to the changing role of the state in this particular conjuncture.

Moving towards a scale-attuned understanding of authoritarian neoliberalism

A range of theorizations over the past several decades have been concerned with the spatiality of the state and the role of scale in the articulation of state power (e.g. Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2008; Peck, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1997). In the following section, I first elaborate on the Poulantzian understanding of the state which the authoritarian neoliberalism literature draws upon, before showing how a conceptualization of scale as socially produced can help us flesh out this understanding. This then allows us to move forward in our understanding of cities and how they relate to other scales (in particular, the national scale) within the context of authoritarian neoliberalism. This type of approach paves the way for a more nuanced understanding of state power, processes of rescaling, as well as potential avenues for resistance against the so-called ‘authoritarian fix’.

In *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas reacts against contemporary Marxist conceptualizations that conceive the state as a monolithic entity that articulates a coherent and unified project to the benefit of capital. In this functionalist understanding, the state is understood to be a constraint on dominated classes ‘from without’, acting as an ‘impenetrable and distinct fortress’ (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 140). In contrast, Poulantzas proposes a reading of the state as constituted by a set of complex and contradictory relationships which nurture the hegemony of a particular social group (or alliance of groups), as well as provide centres of resistance for dominated groups. In other words, the state is not ‘without’ or ‘within’, but rather a ‘*strategic field and process* of intersecting power networks’ – it is a material crystallization of social relations during a given historical period (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 136, emphasis in original).

In line with this, Poulantzas posits authoritarian statism as the range of ‘transformations in social classes, political struggles and the relationship of forces’ that are specific to this particular state form (1978, p. 204). As Bruff (2014, p. 119) points out, certain fractions of capital may be disproportionately favoured over others, such as global finance over manufacturing, and this tends to be coupled with a move away from granting material concessions to dominated social groups. If authoritarian neoliberalism emerges out of a drive to stabilize contradictions, dislocations and crisis tendencies surrounding the 2007 financial crisis through an intensification of coercion, then mapping the social conflicts, compromises and contradictions within a given ‘authoritarian fix’ is of prime importance.

It is here that scale – understood as a sphere of social action – emerges as a fruitful lens for studying the various social relations that lie at the core of authoritarian neoliberalism. Neil Smith, one of the first scholars to theorize scale, argues that it cannot be understood as neutral or fixed, but rather as:

the product of economic, political and social activities and relationships; as such they are as changeable as those relationships themselves. At the very least, different kinds of society produce different kinds of geographical scale for containing and enabling particular forms of social interaction. (1995, pp. 60–61)

In other words, scale is *produced* through social interaction and the resolution of conflicts between different social forces. At the same time, contra Smith, scales should not be understood as separate or distinct spheres which perform concrete, pre-determined functions relative to the overall reproduction of capitalism. Rather, they are mutable, overlapping and historically specific arenas for social action that, through their historical and material legacies, both structure and are structured by capitalist accumulation.

The production of scale is then a central means by which ‘capital is both contained and freed’ (Smith, 1992, p. 75). The associated process of *rescaling* (Brenner, 2004, 2019; Peck, 2002) should be understood as the complex and contested process through which scalar arrangements are reconfigured and new scales of ‘action and emancipation’ emerge (Mahon & Keil, 2009, p. 4). Rescaling destabilizes existing hegemonic structures and social groups, while at the same time providing a permeable terrain for the emergence of new forms of social action, as well as the establishment of new hegemonic social groups. In this sense, ‘the theoretical and political priority never resides in a particular geographical scale, but rather in the process through which particular scales become (re)constituted’ (Swyngedouw, 1997, p. 141).

I argue that authoritarian neoliberal rescaling should then be understood as a crisis-induced transformation of the scaled arrangements of neoliberalism that had previously been in place. In particular, this has led to the restructuring of the role of the national scale in a coercive direction by strengthening its institutional and legal modalities in an effort to reinscribe the hegemony of financial capital. These modalities have been deployed in response to the persistent propulsions of financial capital fractions at the international scale coupled with the ‘wider crisis of capitalism *and* more specific legitimization crises of capitalist states’ (Bruff, 2014, p. 124). Authoritarian neoliberalism must then be understood as intimately bound to the international scale as well, that is, as inherently ‘dependent upon those structural modifications in the relations of production and the processes and social division of labour which characterize the present phase at *both* the world and national levels’ (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 204, emphasis added).

This process of rescaling has also led to a restructuring of the urban in relation to the national and international scales – the urban scale has not withered away in light of seemingly more overpowering top-down processes emanating from the national scale, but has rather become redefined within the broader multiscale form of the state. Conceptualizing the city as a scale allows us to avoid *methodological city-ism* – rather than conceiving the ‘urban’ as juxtaposed to ‘rural’ areas, it becomes possible to conceive the former as a ‘sociospatial relation embedded within a broader, dynamically evolving whole’ (Brenner, 2019, p. 13; 3). A multiscale approach is key in formulating an understanding of the urban as inherently intertwined and bound up with other scales, rather than as a territory vulnerable to top-down action and subsumed within an overarching nation-state. Thus, while there has been an intensification of state power at the national scale, the urban scale has remained central to the (re)assertion of state power. Authoritarian neoliberalism necessitates a close cooperation between urban and national-scale actors in the interest of surmounting crisis tendencies caused by the 2007 crisis and ensuring the free-flow of financial capital at the international scale.

At the same time, an intensification of state power at the national scale has destabilized the pre-crisis role of the urban scale. In particular, the ‘downloading’ or ‘dumping’ of regulatory/financial responsibility and socioeconomic risks from national states to the urban scale characteristic of earlier neoliberal periods (Peck, 2002, p. 343) has been severely disrupted. The authoritarian neoliberal era has seen a gradual reversal of the process of ‘downscaling’ as an increasing number of regulatory/financial responsibilities have been uploaded *back* to the national scale. This reversal has had

profound implications for social relations at the urban scale, as a declining participation in decision-making through formal channels has deepened the need for more wide-ranging political contestation and alliance building at the urban scale. Local forms of resistance have also undergone a qualitative shift relative to resistance that characterized earlier neoliberal periods. For instance, although the local antiworkfare movements of the 1980s and 90s were also highly localized and emerged out of city-level campaigns, they were characterized by a ‘militant particularism’ which undermined their ability to scale up or form cross-locality alliances (Peck, 2002, p. 353).

A scalar lens therefore allows us to flesh out the dynamics through which authoritarian neoliberalism has produced a simultaneous strengthening *and* weakening of the state (Bruff, 2014, p. 124) – that is, through the emergence and intensification of new forms of ‘disruption’ at the urban scale occurring parallel to (and in spite of) the simultaneous intensification of national coercive strategies. This echoes the argument made by Bailey et al. (2017, pp. 2–3) that the 2007 financial crisis (and the range of crises that emanated from it):

has not only led to a ‘hardening’ of European and national state structures, but has also witnessed novel forms of organizing from below, and resistant subjectivities that – albeit sometimes having the appearance of being both fragile and temporary in nature – nevertheless opened potential avenues for radical social change.

The prism of scale helps us to conceptualize both the structural constraints that resistance may encounter, as well as to identify potentialities of collective action and resistance against the status quo.

In the following section, I trace the process of authoritarian neoliberal rescaling in Serbia under the aegis of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). In particular, I explore how the contentious Belgrade Waterfront project acted as a key catalyst in the rescaling of state power and paved the way for the emergence of a range of new urban loci of resistance, in Belgrade as well as a range of other cities. Although Serbia’s historical and institutional specificities (its post-socialist heritage, the legacy of the breakup of Yugoslavia, etc.) render its path of neoliberalization unique in a number of ways, it is a salient case that can be used as a frame of reference for exploring crisis-induced instances of rescaling in other geographical contexts. In the post-2008 period, multiple scales of regulatory restructuring have converged upon the BW project; the latter’s implementation therefore provides a particularly convenient entry point into studying shifts in power relations (and the concomitant process of rescaling) at the core of authoritarian neoliberalism. On another level, the authoritarian neoliberalism conceptual framework is able to speak to existing scholarship on the Belgrade Waterfront and emergent social movements in Serbia in a new, productive way. Recent scholarship has either tended to focus on the authoritarian dimensions of the Belgrade Waterfront project (e.g. Koelemaij, 2020; Perić, 2020) or on grassroots resistance to the project (e.g. Božilović, 2019; Cvetinović et al., 2016; Čukić & Perić, 2019; Petrović, 2019). This paper seeks to situate both within broader discussions about neoliberalism.

My analysis draws on primary sources such as laws and regulations, as well as news reports and media announcements, through which I pinpoint the key regulatory changes made for the purpose of carrying out the Belgrade Waterfront project. I supplement these with secondary sources such as scholarly articles and books by urban studies scholars, sociologists and anthropologists researching Serbian civil society and resistance to the Belgrade Waterfront, which allows me to triangulate between different sources of data. The paper proceeds in two steps – first, I offer a detailed account of the regulatory changes that surrounded the implementation of the BW project and then I trace the emergence of the Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own (Ne da(vi)mo Beograd) movement (as well as a constellation of other local movements) following the BW project.

Authoritarian neoliberal rescaling and the case of the Belgrade Waterfront

The BW project – a residential-commercial urban megaproject that sought to redevelop the right bank of the Sava river – initially formed part of Aleksandar Vučić’s 2012 campaign bid for Belgrade Mayor (“Vučićev projekat ‘Beograd na vodi’”, 2012). It was a grandiose plan that aimed to attract foreign investment to the city by converting the riverbank into a luxury real estate and business district. Following SNS’s (largely) unexpected national electoral victory in 2012, the BW gradually became one of the government’s flagship projects. SNS – formally established in 2008 through a split with the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS¹) – came to power in 2012 by riding on a wave of disillusionment with party politics that led a large portion of the Serbian electorate to abstain from voting (Cabric, 2012). It fashioned itself as a more palatable alternative to the extremist SRS by soft-peddalling its far-right origins and adopting an ostensibly pro-EU programme. As time went on, however, Vučić’s gradual consolidation of power – serving first as Deputy Prime Minister between 2012 and 2014, then as Prime Minister between 2014 and 2017, and finally as President from 2017 onwards – led him to become what one commentator described as ‘Europe’s favorite autocrat’ (Eror, 2018). He has since become infamous for his populist conservative rhetoric, voter intimidation tactics, efforts to constrain media freedoms, as well as his consolidation of corruption and clientelism within the state.

Parallel to this consolidation of power, a range of substantial regulatory changes were made for the purpose of carrying out the BW project in a vaguely legitimate manner. From a project that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs, involve an international tender and generate billions of dollars of foreign investments, the BW turned into a project based on Vučić’s personal ties with Abu Dhabi’s royal family, entirely tailored to the needs of the investor from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In this section, I argue that the regulatory restructuring conducted as part of this project facilitated a process of authoritarian neoliberal rescaling. By ushering in new flows of international capital and reformulating Belgrade’s relationship with the national government, the BW project acted as a crucial conduit for the establishment of an authoritarian regime. In what follows, I take a closer look at this process of rescaling by highlighting key regulatory changes at the three aforementioned scales. The three scales are dealt with chronologically, in the order of events as they took place; I first trace regulatory transformations at the international scale in early 2013, the urban scale in late 2013 and early 2014, and then finally at the national scale in 2014 and 2015.

(i) International scale

Serbia’s neoliberal restructuring has been conditioned by its specific insertion into global financial flows. As a semi-peripheral country (broadly conceived), Serbia’s economy has been critically dependent on capital inflows; its economic policies have therefore been geared toward attracting foreign capital (e.g. a rigid and overvalued exchange rate, high interest rates, etc.) (Becker et al., 2010, p. 229). The 2007 crisis has exacerbated this dependence, rendering it increasingly more difficult to attract FDIs and gain access to credit on international markets. In 2013, the UAE emerged as a key new player willing to provide long-term, low-interest loans to the country, coupled with a range of new strategic investments in agriculture, aviation and the arms industry (Bartlett et al., 2017; Buckley, 2013). As Serbia sought to combat the ripple effects of the 2007 crisis, the UAE’s \$2 billion loan was considered imperative for jumpstarting its economy (Buckley, 2013).

One of the key first steps in the realization of the broad ‘partnership’ between the UAE and Serbia was the signing of a cooperation agreement in February 2013. This multifaceted agreement set

out the range of investments that were to be made by UAE companies, including Etihad Airlines' investment in Serbia's flag-carrying airline Jat (now Air Serbia), as well as Al Dahra's purchase of the state-owned enterprise PKB, the largest agribusiness company in the former Yugoslavia (Serbian Government, 2013). The flagship project envisaged as part of this agreement, however, was the Belgrade Waterfront (BW). Conceived as a strategic outlet for surplus capital, the BW project was complementary to existing UAE strategies of real estate-based growth, particularly in the post-2008 period when the UAE sought to export these strategies outside of the Gulf region (Buckley & Hanieh, 2014, p. 156; Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019, p. 661). In this sense, Belgrade was considered a 'strategic entry point' for UAE capital into the European market (Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019, p. 661). This initial link between the UAE and Serbia therefore reinforced the role of key decision-makers at the national scale (like Vučić), but also pointed to their close dependency on structures and agents entrenched at the international level.

This was reinforced by Serbia's signing of a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with the UAE to 'facilitate' any potential investments. BITs are agreements concluded between two states that set out the rules according to which the investments made by the nationals of either of the two states in each other's territories will be protected (Sornarajah, 2010, p. 175). While both countries' investors are protected by the same rules, in practice, BITs are concluded between unequal partners – between a capital-exporting state on one side (in this case, the UAE) and a capital-importing state on the other (i.e. Serbia) – and therefore tend to structurally favour the state conducting the investment (Sornarajah, 2010, p. 177). One of the key ways in which BITs favour investors is by establishing international arbitration as the norm for resolving investment disputes – a convenient way for foreign investors to circumvent the national courts of the countries they invest in in the event of disputes. Furthermore, protection granted to investors under BITs is considerably more extensive than under national legal systems, meaning that foreign investments in practice achieve a higher level of protection than domestic ones. A BIT therefore significantly reduces the capacity of a state to enforce its own laws and regulations at the national (and local) levels by scaling up these powers to international arbitrators. This initial reworking of the national regulatory apparatus therefore worked to scale up protections for UAE investors, diminishing the role of national courts in deciding on any potential dispute arising from the investment.

(ii) Urban scale

While Aleksandar Vučić's mayoral bid proved unsuccessful at the local elections in 2012, his party received 25% of the votes in Belgrade, changing the balance of power in the City Assembly.² This gave Vučić's party considerable political leverage in the city, placing the incumbent Mayor from the Democratic Party (DS), Dragan Đilas, in an increasingly insecure position. A power play between SNS and the minority parties in the Assembly led to a collapse of the existing DS-led coalition in the fall of 2013, culminating in Đilas's dismissal through a no-confidence vote. Đilas's dismissal was SNS's first step towards securing power at all levels of government; this was fully accomplished once Vučić's advisor, Siniša Mali, was placed in charge of the interim government and subsequently appointed mayor. Following his dismissal, Đilas argued that 'it is absolutely clear that this country is slowly but surely slipping towards dictatorship and autocracy' (Glavonjić, 2013). Throughout the early stages of the project, Mali's public appearances were entirely synchronized with the overarching party narrative, and he frequently appeared alongside Vučić to promote the project at various stages of its realization. Securing power in Belgrade was a crucial step in eliminating any contestation for the BW project at the urban level by scaling up decision-making. The urban scale was

therefore reconstituted in such a way that it became fully imbricated in the national scale, aligning the interests of agents embedded within urban and national power structures.

While contestation at the level of city government was eliminated, Belgrade's major urban plan (also known as the 'Belgrade Master Plan 2021') presented a number of structural constraints for the project. The Belgrade Master Plan 2021, adopted in 2003, stated that the 90 hectares of public land that the Belgrade Waterfront was to be built on (also known as the 'Sava Amphitheater') had 'the greatest potential for building new central, commercial and public amenities in the center of Belgrade' (City of Belgrade, 2003, p. 216). According to this plan, the Sava Amphitheater was to be developed in coordination with the New Belgrade side of the Sava riverbank; the two sides of the river were meant to become:

a new future city center of the highest level, through an international tender, so that a logical visual and contextual connection could be established between the public spaces of the Belgrade and New Belgrade sides. (City of Belgrade, 2003)

In 2014, the now SNS-led City Assembly eliminated these constraints by introducing a series of updates to the Master Plan: the Sava Amphitheater could now be developed separately from the New Belgrade side of the Sava river, height and floor limits for buildings in this part of the city were eliminated, the proportion of public space that would need to be included in the development was removed and an international tender no longer became an official requirement (Ko gradi grad, 2014). This further secured the role of the national scale as the key decision-making sphere for projects embedded at the urban scale. At the same time, scaling up decision-making (and consequently eliminating room for contestation at the urban level) had the paradoxical effect of rendering the urban scale more prone to contestation, caused by a declining ability to formally challenge or participate in decision-making for urban projects (as will be explored in more detail in the following section).

(iii) National scale

Two key changes in the law at the national scale were introduced by the SNS-led Parliament to facilitate the project's implementation: the existing Law on Planning and Construction was first altered in 2014, and this was followed by the adoption of a *lex specialis* in 2015 (Grubbauer & Čamprag, 2019, pp. 658–659). A major way in which the Law on Planning and Construction was altered is by redefining 'Special-Purpose Areas' (SPAs), territories considered to be of major importance for the state. SPAs were previously defined by a closed-list of characteristics that narrowly defined the types of areas that could fall under this category (e.g. areas with cultural, historical or other strategic potential); the changes introduced to the Act in 2014 defined SPAs in an open-ended way and, more importantly, made room 'for the realization of projects which are determined by the Government to constitute projects of importance for the Republic of Serbia' (Law on Planning and Construction 2014, Article 21). This paved the way for the Sava Amphitheater to acquire a special, national status in May 2014 and become integrated into the national legal framework (scaling up its regulatory status), rather than remain subject to local laws and regulations (e.g. the aforementioned Belgrade Master Plan). Introducing 'Special Purpose Areas' therefore also had the effect of removing the need for rounds of public debates and approval by actors at the urban scale, otherwise an integral part of urban projects (Čukić & Perić, 2019, p. 279). The Law on Planning and Construction was also altered to essentially allow private investors who have leased land for construction purposes to convert the status of that land, and ultimately take ownership over it

once construction has been finalized (Law on Planning and Construction 2014, Article 103). In the context of the BW, this means that once the construction of each building envisaged as part of the project has been completed, the investor also effectively becomes the owner of the land on which that building has been erected. Scaling up the regulatory status of the project therefore had the ultimate consequence of tying the urban project to Gulf capital flows within the international economy.

In addition to scaling up its regulatory status, the BW project was also removed from regulatory constraints at the national scale through the adoption of a *lex specialis* in 2015 which overrode all relevant national laws. In particular, the *lex specialis* established ‘public interest’ for the building of luxury real estate and commercial amenities in the Sava Amphitheater – a necessary move for the expropriation of private property (that is, the small portion of the Sava Amphitheater that was not state-owned). The *lex specialis* was also passed without public debate, a legally mandated step for any law that, according to the Law on State Administration, ‘significantly changes the legal regime in a certain area or law that regulates matters of special interest to the public’ (Transparency Serbia, 2015). The *lex specialis*, an exceptional legal measure, was an inherently national legal mechanism, yet one that overrode all existing urban *and* national regulations, once again to the advantage of processes occurring on the international scale.

In sum, a process of authoritarian neoliberal restructuring, entailing a reworking of the relationship between urban, national and international scales, occurred in Serbia in the period between 2013 and 2015. While this ultimately led to a consolidation of power at the national level, it was contingent on the restructuring of the national scale’s relationship with processes on both the urban and international levels – most notably, by opening up Belgrade’s real estate market to international financial flows and paving the way for a range of dubious international investments in lucrative national industries. It was through this complex process that Vučić and his closest allies succeeded in concentrating power both within their own party and Serbia as a whole. Therefore, while authoritarian neoliberalism inherently refers to a concentration of power at the national scale, it must also be understood as a process of *rescaling* whereby a new scalar arrangement has emerged to adapt to the needs of a crisis-ridden neoliberal system. In the following section, I outline how this process of rescaling has simultaneously led to the emergence of new forms of contestation.

Don’t let Belgrade d(r)own and the intensification of urban struggles

Throughout the late 1990s, a fluid national movement played a key role in opposing Slobodan Milošević’s (strongly centralized) authoritarian regime, skewing Serbia’s³ political terrain in favour of the national scale. At the core of this movement was the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), an ideologically diverse coalition of political actors ranging from Otpor – a youth movement – to the conservative, pro-Russian Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). The anti-Milošević effort was further buttressed by NGOs, also operating primarily on the national scale, which acted as a key link to the international community while the country was under international sanctions (Božilović, 2019, p. 155; Vetta, 2019, p. 17). A key legacy of the 1990s was that the national scale came to be perceived as the central (if not sole) arena for meaningful political action.

Following the ousting of Milošević in October 2000, DOS splintered into over a dozen political parties, while NGOs were ‘professionalized’ and oriented themselves towards securing foreign donors’ funds, fuelling the emergence of a ‘donor-driven civil society’ (Mikuš, 2018, pp. 5–6; 13; Vetta, 2009, pp. 29–30). The anti-Milošević effort gradually transformed into a joint neoliberal restructuring effort – conditioned and incentivized by a host of foreign actors (e.g. World Bank,

EU, US). The national scale remained a key political arena, although decentralization – implemented as part of various structural adjustment, democratization and EU accession efforts – worked to destabilize the scalar hierarchy (Avlijaš & Bartlett, 2011, pp. 5–6). An increasing number of competencies and responsibilities were transferred to the local level and, even through central government retained control over fiscal capacities, a patchworked partisan landscape across scales emerged (Avlijaš & Bartlett, 2011, p. 27). Civil activity through social movements remained sparse during the 2000s; only a small number of movements seeking to defend various civil liberties (e.g. the LGBT movement) – and the right-wing movements that emerged in response to them – endured (Božilović, 2019, p. 156).

The emergence of Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own (Ne da(vi)mo Beograd, or NDMBGD) represented a major disruption to this political landscape and the scalar hierarchy that underpinned it. NDMBGD emerged as a small, informal group of Belgrade-based activists working on urban justice issues in collectives like the Ministry of Space (Ministarstvo prostora) (Petrović, 2019). The group argued that the project was being carried out in an opaque way, tailored exclusively to the needs of the investor and architecturally incompatible with its surroundings (Čukić & Perić, 2019, p. 285; Radoja, 2014). Between 2014 and 2016, a variety of tactics were deployed to bring public attention to the project – from 'in-office' activism to street protests (Petrović, 2019, p. 178). The organization was largely self-funded during this time – the demand for resources was low, allowing it to be sustained by voluntary work, small donations by activists and project money from the Ministry of Space (Petrović, 2019, p. 182).

NDMBGD rose to national prominence in the spring of 2016 in the wake of the Savamala demolitions. In the night between 25 and 26 April 2016, a group of masked men destroyed a number of privately-owned objects in Belgrade's Savamala district, situated in the Sava Amphitheater ('Serbs rally against shady demolitions' 2016). One passerby and a security guard, who passed away a month later, were tied and held as the demolitions were carried out ('Serbs rally against shady demolitions' 2016). Subsequent media reports showed that clearing this part of the Sava Amphitheater was necessary for the government to fulfil its contractual obligations with the investor, as per the Joint Venture agreement. In the days that followed, NDMBGD was one of the first organizations to react to reports of the demolitions; the series of street protests that it organized in the capital drew massive crowds ('Serbs rally against shady demolitions' 2016). While the protests were directed towards this specific event, they quickly acquired broader relevance and grew into a citywide revolt against the unlawful actions of an increasingly authoritarian state (best illustrated by the protest chant 'Whose city? Our city!').

The public attention that it gained during this period allowed NDMBGD to develop from a single-issue movement that emerged organically in response to the BW project to an increasingly formal organization with capacities to tackle a variety of urban and social justice issues across Belgrade and the rest of the country. From 2016 onwards, NDMBGD has worked on forming key links with grassroots initiatives like Local Front (Lokalni front) from Kraljevo and the United Movement of Free Tenants (Ujedinjeni pokret slobodnih stanara) from Niš, founded in response to corruption in local government, rising prices of public utilities, privatization of public resources, etc. (Božilović, 2019, p. 164; Petrović, 2019, p. 178). It has also lent its support to new, increasingly powerful local movements engaged in resisting the construction of mini hydropower plants throughout southeastern Serbia ('Ne davimo Beograd' uz Toplodolce' 2019). Within Belgrade itself, it has supported The Roof (Za krov nad glavom), an anti-eviction resistance movement, Solidarity Kitchen (Solidarna kuhinja), an independent collective that provides food assistance to impoverished citizens, as well as myriad other groups engaging in different forms of mutual aid and direct action (e.g.

Sačuvajmo naš parkić, Savski Nasip, Odbranimo Teslu) (Petrović, 2019, p. 183). Therefore, while NDMBGD has not had much success electorally,⁴ it has triggered a process of ‘grassroots community reorganization’ (Las Heras & Ribera-Almandoz, 2017, p. 459) and become an anchor within a budding ecosystem of solidarity at the local level.

NDMBGD has also made various efforts to ‘upscale’ its political engagement. It played a central role in organizing the national ‘Against Dictatorship’ protests in the wake of the spring 2017 presidential elections which drew tens of thousands of citizens to protests in cities throughout the country (Petrović, 2019, p. 183). It has also participated in forming the Civic Front (Građanski front), a national alliance of local movements seeking to defend public resources, change their management and use, and fight for media freedom (Mikuš, 2018, p. 287). While the Civic Front has so far had ambivalent results in trying to shift local struggles to the national scale, its constituent organizations have broken new ground by forging a viable new alliance across seemingly disjointed local struggles.

Authoritarian neoliberal rescaling has triggered the emergence of new forms of – increasingly networked and consolidated – contestation. Although a retraction of the Belgrade Waterfront would have been a clear indicator of the success of this contestation, it should not be the sole barometer. By stopping hundreds of evictions, handing out thousands of meals and halting the construction of a mini hydropower plant, local movements have won a host of other material successes. Perhaps even more importantly, the movements have participated in the creation of a strong *legacy* through the ways in which they have ‘shape[d] and disrupt[ed] the way in which dominance is executed’ (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 3). Rescaling has worked to reshuffle channels and sites of political participation and contestation, opening new avenues for radical social change (Bailey et al., 2017, p. 3).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that research on authoritarian neoliberalism in urban contexts must not treat the latter solely as a territory, but rather as a scale, embedded within broader social relations that constitute the state. By tracing the enabling and constraining effects of scale in shaping capital flows, it becomes possible to zoom in on how a reconfigured relationship between the urban, national and international scales has nurtured an authoritarian neoliberal mode of governance. A multiscale understanding of the state allows us to capture how this mode of governance is produced, generating new terrains both for hegemonic power as well as contestation. From this standpoint, authoritarian neoliberal urbanisms have become deeply imbricated with the national scale, and agents embedded at the urban scale have begun closely coordinating decision-making and regulatory changes with an overarching national project. At the same time, this has worked to weaken the state, making it more prone to contestation at the urban scale. As such, unlike pre-crisis forms of local resistance to neoliberalism which appeared in ‘pockets’ and could ‘all too easily [be] bypassed, outflanked and overcome’ (Peck, 2002, p. 357), such resistance is now increasingly concerted, coordinated and difficult to circumvent.

In the Serbian context, authoritarian neoliberal rescaling can be traced through the complex and extensive regulatory restructuring following SNS’s 2012 election win, and Aleksandar Vučić’s gradual rise to power. By eliminating structural (the Belgrade urban plan) and agential (Mayor Đilas) obstacles to the BW project at the urban scale, decision-making was effectively scaled up to the national level. While this led to a concentration of power nationally, this power was ultimately contingent on broader crisis-propelled flows of UAE capital at the international scale as well as a

further upscaling of the regulatory apparatus to the international level, as the signing of the BIT agreement awarded the UAE investor considerable protections vis-à-vis a system of international arbitration. At the urban scale, this also entailed a fundamental reconceptualization of the role and purpose of public space by redefining the meaning of public interest through the *lex specialis*, as well as the role of land through the redefinition of 'Special-Purpose Areas'.

And yet, scaling up decision-making and regulation has effectively rendered the urban scale more susceptible to contestation, as dominated social groups have sought out new outlets for countering an increasingly coercive and oppressive state apparatus. This has led to the emergence of new social movements that have reignited activism at the local level in a way that has not been seen in Serbia's recent history. NDMBGD has acted as the fountainhead for this wave of grassroots activism, paving the way for the emergence of a range of other local organizations. This increasingly powerful constellation of local organizations should therefore be understood as a specific feature of Serbia's authoritarian neoliberal era; it should also represent a key resource in efforts to construct an alternative to both the Vučić regime and other iterations of neoliberal rule in Serbia. Thus, while the BW project in many ways marks the entrenchment of authoritarian neoliberalism in Serbia, it has also acted as a catalyst for the emergence of forceful anti-neoliberal movements throughout the country.

Overall, a multiscalar approach to understanding authoritarian neoliberalism is beneficial for providing a relational understanding of how regulatory restructuring plays out across scales. Yet, this process must also be understood as variegated, as inherited institutional and scalar landscapes bear considerably upon how authoritarian neoliberal rescaling plays out in each context. Further work on this topic could explore this process through a comparative lens, as well shed more light on how authoritarian neoliberal restructuring has changed relations and interdependencies between scales. It would be beneficial to further explore how changing international financial flows in the post-2007 crisis period have exerted pressures on institutions and agents at the national scale, and how power struggles at the nexus between the urban and national scale have resulted in a reconceptualization of land and public space. This could serve to further flesh out the key spatial transformations undergone by authoritarian neoliberal contexts.

Notes

1. SRS was founded by Vojislav Šešelj, a convicted war criminal well-known for his hate speech and incendiary nationalism advocating the creation of a 'Greater Serbia' throughout the civil war in the 1990s.
2. At the Belgrade local elections, the Mayor is not elected directly by voters but rather by members of the Assembly (Law on the Capital City 2007, Article 23). In other words, citizens vote for parties – who propose their respective Mayoral candidates – rather than for the Mayoral candidates themselves.
3. At that time, the Republic of Serbia – along with the Republic of Montenegro – still formed part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
4. The initiative participated in the Belgrade elections in March 2018 and won 3.5% of votes (5% is the threshold for entering the City Assembly) (Petrović, 2019, p. 184).

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Critical Political Economy Research Network (CPERN) mid-term workshop held on 19 & 20 June 2020. I would like to thank the organizers and the participants for their comments. I would also like to thank Ian Bruff, Karim Knio, as well as three anonymous reviewers; I

have benefited greatly from their valuable and helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Ivan Čavdarević for sharing his legal expertise and insights. All errors and omissions are my own.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Aleksandra Piletić is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests are situated at the broad intersection between political economy and political geography, and she is particularly interested in capitalist variety, neoliberal restructuring and urban transformations.

References

- Avlijaš, S., & Bartlett, W. (2011). The political economy of decentralization and regional policy in Serbia: Choices and outcomes. *LSE Papers on Decentralization and Regional Policy*, Research Paper No. 3, July 2011.
- Bailey, D. J., Clua-Losada, M., Huke, N., & Ribera-Almandoz, O. (2017). *Beyond defeat and austerity: disrupting (the critical political economy of) neoliberal Europe*. Routledge.
- Bartlett, W., Ker-Lindsay, J., Alexander, K., & Prelec, T. (2017). The UAE as an emerging actor in the Western Balkans: The case of strategic investment in Serbia. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 7(1), 94–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2017.1322753>
- Becker, J., Jäger, J., Leubolt, B., & Weissenbacher, R. (2010). Peripheral financialization and vulnerability to crisis: A regulationist perspective. *Competition and Change*, 14(3-4), 225–247. <https://doi.org/10.1179/102452910X12837703615337>
- Božilović, J. (2019). Right to the city: Urban movements and initiatives as the pulse of civil society in Serbia. In J. Petrović, & V. Backović (Eds.), *Experiencing postsocialist capitalism: Urban challenges and challenges in Serbia* (pp. 151–170). University of Belgrade.
- Brenner, N. (2004). *New state spaces: Urban governance and the rescaling of statehood*. Oxford University Press.
- Brenner, N. (2019). *New urban spaces: Urban theory and the scale question*. Oxford University Press.
- Bruff, I. (2014). The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism. *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, 26(1), 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2013.843250>
- Bruff, I. (2016). Neoliberalism and authoritarianism. In S. Springer, K. Birch, & J. MacLeavy (Eds.), *The handbook of neoliberalism* (pp. 107–117). Routledge.
- Bruff, I., & Tansel, C. B. (2019). Authoritarian neoliberalism: Trajectories of knowledge production and praxis. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502497>
- Buckley, M., & Hanieh, A. (2014). Diversification by urbanization: Tracing the property-finance nexus in Dubai and the Gulf. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(1), 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12084>
- Buckley, N. (2013, October 7). Serbia seeks billions in loans from UAE amid bankruptcy fears. *Financial Times*. Retrieved November 10, 2020, from <https://www.ft.com/content/672a7b1c-2f4a-11e3-8cb2-00144feab7de>
- Cabric, N. (2012, May 7). Serbia's disgruntled voters make fun of elections. *Balkan Insight*. Retrieved May 27, 2020, from <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/05/07/serbians-make-light-out-of-the-elections/>
- City of Belgrade. (2003). Generalni Plan Beograda 2021. Belgrade, 22 September. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from https://nastava.sf.bg.ac.rs/pluginfile.php/11248/mod_resource/content/0/ZAKONI_I_PRAVILNICI/GUP_BGD.pdf
- Cvetinović, M., Maričić, T., & Bolay, J.-C. (2016). Participatory urban transformations in Savamala. *Belgrade – Capacities and Limitations. Spatium*, 36(1), 15–23. <https://doi.org/10.2298/SPAT1636015C>

- Čukić, I., & Perić, A. (2019). Transformation of the spatial planning approach in Serbia: Towards strengthening the civil sector? In B. Scholl, A. Perić, & M. Niedermaier (Eds.), *Spatial and Transport infrastructure development in Europe: Example of the orient/east-med corridor* (pp. 272–290). Forschungsberichte der ARL 12.
- Di Giovanni, A. (2016). Urban transformation under authoritarian neoliberalism. In C. B. Tansel (Ed.), *States of discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order* (pp. 107–128). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Error, A. (2018, March 9). How Aleksandar Vucic became Europe's favorite autocrat. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved May 23, 2020, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/09/how-aleksandar-vucic-became-europes-favorite-autocrat/>
- Glavonjić, Z. (2013, September 24). Gradonačelnik Beograda Đilas smenjen, optužuje Vučića za koncentraciju vlasti. *Radio Slobodna Evropa*. Retrieved May 24, 2020, from <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/beograd-gradska-skupstina-o-smeni-djilasa/25116219.html>
- Grubbauer, M., & Čamprag, N. (2019). Urban megaprojects, nation-state politics and regulatory capitalism in central and Eastern Europe: The Belgrade Waterfront project. *Urban Studies*, 56(4), 649–671. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018757663>
- Jenss, A. (2019). Authoritarian neoliberal rescaling in Latin America: Urban in/security and austerity in Oaxaca. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 304–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502493>
- Jessop, B. (2008). *State power: A strategic-relational approach*. Polity Press.
- Koelemaij, J. (2020). Dubaification in practice: An inter-scalar analysis of Belgrade Waterfront. *Urban Studies*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1721205>.
- Ko gradi grad. (2014, July 9). Hitna akcija: Podnesimo primedbe na izmene generalnog plana Beograda. Belgrade. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from <https://www.kogradigrad.org/2014/07/09/hitna-akcija-podnesimo-primedbe-na-izmene-generalnog-plana-beograda/>
- Las Heras, J., & Ribera-Almandoz, O. (2017). When corporatism fails: Trade union strategies and grassroots resistance to the Spanish economic crisis. *Journal of Labor and Society*, 20(4), 449–466. <https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12303>
- Lawreniuk, S. (2020). Intensifying political geographies of authoritarianism: Toward an anti-geopolitics of garment worker struggles in neoliberal Cambodia. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 110(4), 1174–1191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2019.1670040>
- Mahon, R., & Keil, R. (2009). Introduction. In R. Keil, & R. Mahon (Eds.), *Leviathan undone? Towards a political economy of scale* (pp. 3–26). UBC Press.
- Mikuš, M. (2018). *Frontiers of civil society: Government and hegemony in Serbia*. Berghahn Books.
- “Ne davimo Beograd” uz Toplodolce – pozivaju na odbranu reka. (2019, September 9). *Južne Vesti*. Retrieved November 9, 2020, from <https://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Ne-davimo-Beograd-uz-Toplodolce-pozivaju-na-odbranu-reka.sr.html>
- Peck, J. (2002). Political economies of scale: Fast policy, interscalar relations, and neoliberal workfare. *Economic Geography*, 78(3), 331–360. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4140813>
- Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2019). Still neoliberalism? *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 118(2), 245–265. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-7381122>
- Perić, A. (2020). Public engagement under authoritarian entrepreneurialism: The Belgrade Waterfront project. *Urban Research & Practice*, 13(2), 213–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2019.1670469>
- Petrović, J. (2019). The transformative power of urban movements on the European periphery: The case of the Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own Initiative. In J. Petrović & (Ed.), V. Backovi (eds.), *Experiencing Postsocialist capitalism: Urban changes and Challenges in Serbia*, 171–188. University of Belgrade.
- Poulantzas, N. (1978). *State, power, socialism*. Verso.
- Radoja, Ž. (2014, July 23). Beograd na vodi, javna rasprava u vetar. *Kontra Press*. Retrieved November 7, 2020, from <https://www.kontrapress.com/clanak.php?rub=GRADovanje&url=Beograd-na-vodi-javna-rasprava-u-vetar>
- Serbian Government. (2013). Agreement on cooperation between the government of the Republic of Serbia and the government of United Arab Emirates. Belgrade, 17 February. Retrieved May 21, 2020, from <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/zakoni/2013/817-13Lat.pdf>
- Serbs rally against shady demolitions after masked crew 'tied up witnesses.'. (2016, May 26). *The Guardian*. Retrieved May 26, 2020, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/26/serbs-rally-against-shady-demolitions-after-masked-crew-tied-up-witnesses>

- Smith, N. (1992). Geography, difference and the politics of scale. In J. Doherty, E. Graham, & M. Malek (Eds.), *Postmodernism and the social Sciences* (pp. 57–79). Springer.
- Smith, N. (1995). Remaking scale: Competition and cooperation in prenational and postnational Europe. In H. Eskelinen, & F. Snickars (Eds.), *Competitive European Peripheries* (pp. 59–74). Springer.
- Sornarajah, M. (2010). *The international law on foreign investment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Swyngedouw, E. (1997). Neither global nor local: 'glocalization' and the politics of scale. In K. Cox (Ed.), *Spaces of globalization: Reasserting the power of the local* (pp. 115–136). Guilford.
- Tansel, C. B. (2019). Reproducing authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey: Urban governance and state restructuring in the shadow of executive centralization. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 320–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502494>
- Tansel, C. B. (2018) Authoritarian neoliberalism and democratic backsliding in Turkey: Beyond the narratives of progress. *South European Society and Politics*, 23(2), 197–217.
- Transparency Serbia. (2015, March 16). "Lex specialis" – for exceptional cases only. *Transparency Serbia*. Retrieved May 25, 2020, from <https://www.transparentnost.org.rs/index.php/en/110-english/naslovna/7473-lex-specialis-for-exceptional-cases-only>
- Vetta, T. (2009). 'Democracy building' in Serbia: The NGO effect. *Southeastern Europe*, 33(1), 26–47. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633309X421148>
- Vetta, T. (2019). *Democracy struggles: NGOs and the politics of Aid in Serbia*. Berghahn Books.
- "Vučićev projekat BeoGRAD na vodi". (2012, April 12). B92. Retrieved May 27, 2020, from https://www.b92.net/info/izbori2012/vesti.php?yyyy=2012&mm=04&dd=12&nav_id=599907
- Zakon o planiranju i izgradnji (Law on Planning and Construction) (2014). Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia. Retrieved May 27, 2020, from <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/planning-and-building-act-serbia.html>
- Zakon o glavnom gradu (Law on the Capital City) (2007). Official Herald of the Republic of Serbia. Retrieved May 27, 2020, from https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_glavnom_gradu.html